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## ‘I’ve always wanted a place to call home’

**A D.C. teen is among 38 youths whose adoptions will be formalized Saturday**

By [Keith L. Alexander](#) November 21 at 9:13 PM



Meg Gibbon, 47, left, her wife, Angela Pelletier, 43, right, their adopted 19-year-old daughter, Jamie Smith, and Jamie's son, William Smith, 2, are seen at their family home in Washington. (Astrid Riecken/For The Washington Post)

When she was 7, D.C. social workers removed Jamie Danetta Smith from her then-drug- and alcohol-addicted mother and placed her into a child-welfare program.

For 12 years, Jamie was shuffled among seven foster families in the District and Maryland, hoping each time that she would find a home.

Twice, it almost happened. Jamie was paired with one prospective adoptive family, but it wasn't a good fit. Then about three years ago, another family showed interest. But that adoption fell through after Jamie learned that she was pregnant.

Now, at 19, Jamie finally has found parents who not only want her but also fell in love with her son, William, an energetic, McDonald's-loving, Elmo-watching toddler who likes scribbling on his bedroom walls. In ink.

#### D.C. children in foster care

On Nov. 18 for each year below, here are the number of children in foster care awaiting adoption, and not yet in a pre-adoptive home.

Age	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	Total
0 - 5	19	24	30	28	31	132
6 - 11	23	18	27	34	40	142
12 - 17	36	48	64	90	126	364
18 - 21	15	18	17	12	6	68
Total	93	108	138	164	203	706

Source: CFSA FACES reports.

On Saturday at D.C. Superior Court's 28th annual Adoption Day ceremony, Jamie will be the oldest of the 38 children and teenagers whose adoptions will be formalized. Jamie found her new family in part from an effort by the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency to facilitate adoptions for more teens and young adults. The goal is to link the youngsters with families before they turn 21, age out of the system and have to live on their own.

Now, Jamie said, she finally has a place where she belongs — for good.

“I’ve always wanted a place to call home, especially for the holidays,” she said. “It’s permanent living. It’s where I feel welcomed.”

In the District, of the 93 children and teens waiting to be adopted, 15 are between the ages of 18 and 21, according to CFSA. That’s more than double from 2010, when there were only six.

Youth advocates say infants and younger children are the most sought after by adults looking to adopt. Children 10 and older have a more difficult time.

Charelia Bazemore, a supervisor with CFSA’s adoptive and foster parent program, said she recently met with a couple who wanted to adopt an infant because the mother wanted to hear a child say “Mommy.” But Bazemore implored the prospective parent to think of older children. “They can say ‘Mommy, too’,” Bazemore advised her.

Teenagers and young adults, Bazemore said, still need parenting, still need someone to love them unconditionally as they grow into adulthood. And for some parents with active lifestyles who don’t have time for day care or diapers, an older child is preferable, Bazemore said.

“They need someone who will invest in their dreams and goals, someone who will look after them when they return home from college, to teach them how to pay bills or buy their first home,” Bazemore said.



Angela Pelletier has a tender moment with William Smith, the son of her adopted daughter, at their home. (Astrid Riecken/For The Washington Post)

Jamie met her “mommies,” as she calls them, Meg Gibbon and Angela Pelletier, three years ago through Family and Youth Initiative, a D.C. nonprofit program that focuses on uniting prospective adoptive parents with teens in foster care.

Gibbon, 47, a former high school teacher who now works as an actuary, and Pelletier, a 43-year-old lawyer, said they focused on adopting a teenager because teens are at risk of never knowing what it means to grow up in a family environment.

For Jamie, in addition to a home, there are plenty of little things she’s appreciated. She’s been able to ditch the eyeglasses she’s worn most of her life after Gibbon showed her how to wear contact lenses. And Pelletier is teaching her to drive.

“There are all these loving cliches out there like ‘It takes a village,’ but there really is a need,” Gibbon said.

Some of the couple’s friends questioned their decision to adopt a teenager, who could be unpredictable, especially when there are many parents who are frustrated with their biological teens. The difference, Pelletier said, is that she

and her wife met Jamie as a teen, whereas biological parents are often shocked and frustrated when their sweet, loving child turns moody and rebellious.

“See, we’re not surprised. We already know what type of teenager she’s going to be,” Pelletier said, laughing.

In 2011, the couple moved from Arlington County to a four-bedroom house in Northeast Washington near Gallaudet University, where, they said, as a same-sex couple with a multiracial family, they could blend in more with the diversity of the neighborhood than in Northern Virginia. “We wanted to set ourselves up for success so we wanted to be somewhere where we weren’t unusual and we weren’t judged,” Gibbon said.

Before the adoption process was finalized, Jamie spent a year living with Gibbon and Pelletier on the weekends to make sure everyone got along. Jamie also keeps in daily contact with her biological mother but said her mother is still not able to take care of her.

It hasn’t all been easy. More recently, Jamie admits that adhering to Gibbon and Pelletier’s rules has been challenging, including the “quiet time” rule that means by 9 on weeknights, no phone calls and everyone settled in their bedrooms. That was a source of frustration. “Yeah, I got heated. But we worked through it,” Pelletier said.

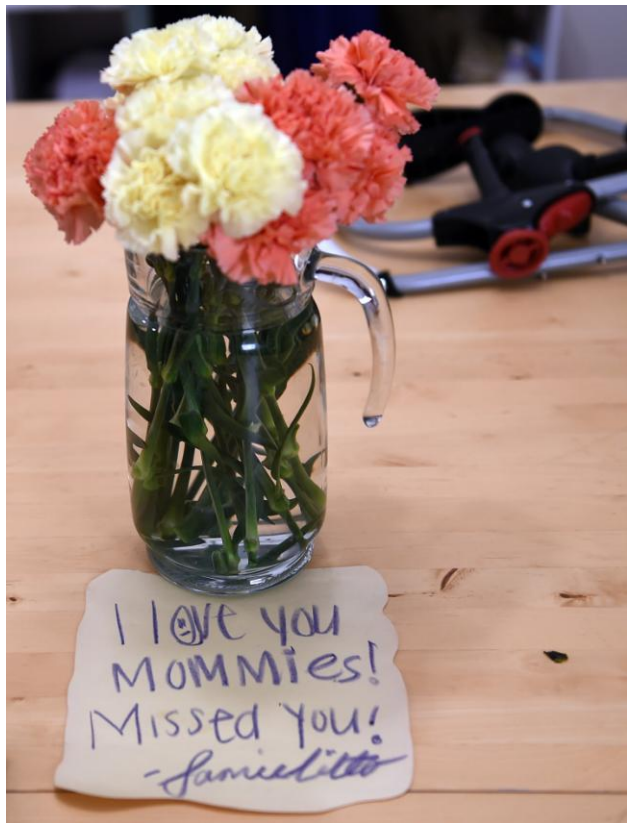
“We set rules in place for a reason, and, as a teenager, Jamie has to butt up against that,” Gibbon said.

Some teenage problems are universal. Pelletier says her friends who have teenagers have the same issues they have with Jamie. “How do we get them to load the dishwasher?” she laughed. Jamie, sitting nearby, rolled her eyes.

“We are this safety net,” Gibbon said. “The reality is you are changing the landscape of a young person’s life. They will have a reaction to that. There will be days that they will be annoyed by us loving them.”

Jamie said it's a little annoying when each day, Gibbon or Pelletier asks how her day went. She admits that she's not used to the attention. "I know they love me," Jamie said, "and I know they ask because they love me. But every day? Really?"

Gibbon and Pelletier said now that they have a teenager and a grandchild, a Great Dane mix and two cats, they have no plans for additional children. Pelletier added, "I think our family is complete."



When Meg Gibbon and Angela Pelletier returned from a trip to Key West, Fla., they found flowers and a note from their adopted daughter, Jamie Smith, on the kitchen table at their home. (Astrid Riecken/For The Washington Post)